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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 005671

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/05/2013

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: OPPOSITION CHP IN DENIAL OVER FLAGGING
POLL NUMBERS

REF: A. ANKARA 4862

[1](#)B. ISTANBUL 1231

(U) Classified by Political Counselor John Kunstadter.
Reason: 1.5 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) continues to argue against sending Turkish troops to Iraq as part of a stabilization force -- so far to no noticeable effect with the voters. Although hurting at the polls, senior members of the party seem unconcerned with the direction their party is going. They expect few changes, if any, to occur in the party's senior leadership at CHP's general convention this fall and seem content to bide their time until nationwide local elections, currently scheduled for early next spring. End summary.

Still Using The Iraq Club

[1](#)2. (C) Much as they did prior to March 1, senior members of the main opposition CHP, including chairman Deniz Baykal, continue to try to use the Iraq issue to bash the ruling AK Party and swipe at the U.S. CHP Deputy Group Chairman Oguz Oyan recently lambasted USG Iraq policy and said sending Turkish troops to Iraq would be "crazy." Privately, CHP officials say the AK Government is not being consistent in its policy and is not sharing information with CHP. Moreover, CHP M.P.s have often been defensive when addressing the party's Iraq policy. In a Sept. 3 meeting with us, CHP Vice Chairman Sinan Yerlikaya, who is close to Baykal, defended his party's stance for half an hour, despite poloff's attempts to steer the conversation away from Iraq. He argued -- in a bizarre twist of logic -- that "if Turkey had gone into Iraq under a CHP government, none of the USG's current difficulties would exist." Asked why, then, CHP does not support sending troops to Iraq, he weakly argued that his party wants a "more comprehensive" agreement with the USG. Yerlikaya then proceeded to repeat himself several times as if he was trying to convince himself of his own argument. Searching for a way out of the rhetorical trap he set for himself, Yerlikaya then claimed that the CHP leadership has not made a final policy decision on sending troops and that the press "may have exaggerated" recent harsh comments by Baykal.

Negative Public Opinion Numbers

[1](#)3. (C) CHP's often anti-American stance against Turkish participation in a stabilization force in Iraq does not seem to be winning points with the public. Amid party defections (ref A) and reported internal opposition, which has arisen in several recent provincial party congresses -- most notably in Istanbul (ref B) -- support for CHP continues to fall, according to recent polling numbers. Data from one poll conducted in August by the firm Pollmark -- set up by professors from Middle Eastern Technical University in Ankara -- indicated that if national elections were held today, CHP would received only 11.7 percent of the vote, a far cry from the 19 percent CHP received last November. The same poll asked voters to choose the most popular politician in Turkey. Only 4.2 percent of those surveyed chose Baykal, placing him behind his arch-rival, former P.M. Ecevit, and just ahead of Islamist former P.M. Erbakan. Another August poll by ANAR, which we have found to be reliable in the past, showed support for CHP at 12.3 percent. Meanwhile, the ruling AK Party garnered more than 30 percent in both polls.

Business as Usual

14. (C) Despite declining polling numbers and internal turmoil, recent conversations with senior CHP M.P.s reveal a party without a sense of urgency. Yerlikaya downplayed opposition within the party, asserting that no one in the party is upset with the leadership's basic policies. Instead, Yerlikaya argued that those who made a show in Istanbul (by protesting Baykal's chosen candidate to run CHP's provincial office) only want Baykal to be more vocal in his opposition to the AK Government. Yerlikaya, who is close to the CHP leader, claimed that Baykal prefers to be more "constructive" in his opposition and will continue to be so.

15. (C) In a Sept. 4 private meeting, CHP Deputy Secretary General Algan Hacaloglu, who is responsible for party membership issues, asserted that polling numbers do not mean much right now. He acknowledged, however, that local elections -- currently scheduled for early next spring -- will be an important test for CHP. Hacaloglu does not expect many changes in CHP's executive bodies during the party's general convention (which we understand will be held late October/early November), but CHP M.P. and former State Minister Kemal Dervis might win a spot on the Central Administrative Board. (Note: Hacaloglu became agitated when poloff mentioned Dervis's calls for re-making CHP by recruiting younger members and claimed Baykal had already issued similar calls. "These statements do not belong to Dervis; they belong to the party." End note.)

16. (C) In a general discussion of CHP, Hacaloglu admitted that the party had not made inroads with Anatolian voters. Echoing CHP complaints from the run-up to last November's national elections, Hacaloglu said the party has not been able to explain itself effectively to Anatolia. Nevertheless, with an air of elitism common among senior CHP officials, Hacaloglu claimed that the party remains strong in the more educated and developed parts of Turkey. "This means that as Turkey continues to develop, the future is bright for CHP."

EDELMAN